FROME URBAN DISTRICT COUNCIL.

ANNUAL REPORT

of the MEDICAL OFFICER OF HEALTH, for the year 1894.

GENTLEMEN,—I am glad to present to you a report this year which is in every respect a satisfactory one, and in some respects eminently so. Damp, wet weather, with an abnormal rainfall, has characterized 1894, and, in direct variance with popular opinion, this is always healthy. Rain is the great equalizer of temperature, and extremes of heat and cold always tend to prodnce disease and death. It has been truly said that a frost is like a wave of death passing over the country. We may claim, I think, some credit for the manner in which sanitation is now carried on, but the climatic conditions chiefly account for the very low death-rate during the past year.

In the months of January, March, April, May and June, the deaths exceeded those in the corresponding months of 1893. In the first month, the influenza epidemic, which so seriously affected the mortality in the preceding December, still remained, and we had in addition cold weather with some severe frosts; in the other months, easterly winds were often prevalent, and the deaths were principally among old people. In the remaining seven months, the deaths were exceptionally few,—August being especially noticeable with only six. It will be observed that in the first three months the deaths were more than a third of the whole number registered during the year. In 1893, more than a third occurred in the last three months. This is an additional proof, if such were needed, of the dire effect of an influenza epidemic on the general mortality. It remains, however, a matter for congratulation that our deaths last year were thirty-eight fewer than in 1893, thirty-four less than in 1892, and thirty-one less than in 1891. I append a comparative table:—

	1894.	1893.
January	24	18
February	10	13
March	21	13
April	15	11
May	20	12
June	11	10
July	9	15
August	6	18
September	10	17
October	9	22
November	11	18
December	11	28
Totals ...	157	195

Of the 157 deaths registered, 84 were males and 73 females; the ratio being 16·33 per 1,000, as against 20·28 in 1893, and 19·89 in 1892, and eliminating eight persons who died in the Workhouse, one in the Cottage Hospital, and one at the Diocesan Home for Waifs and Strays, these not being resident in the Urban Sanitary District, the death-rate is only 15·29 per 1,000 inhabitants living. The relative ages at death were as follows:—

	1894.	1893.	1892.
(1) Under 1 year ...	24	31	22
(2) From 1 to 5 years...	15	11	14
(3) From 5 to 15 years...	5	5	6
(4) From 15 to 25 years...	4	7	7
(5) From 25 to 60 years...	33	47	48
(6) Above 60 years...	76	94	94
Totals ...	157	195	191

One person died at the age of 91, and 18 between 80 and 90. Four persons died at the Cottage Hospital, one being a non-resident, and 28 in the Workhouse, eight being non-residents of the Urban District. The mortality below one year is nearly the same as in 1892, and shows a considerable decrease from that of 1893. The numbers in the second, third, and fourth lines amount to much the same total, but in the last two come the marked difference, which as I have before pointed out is due to rainy skies, and weather which is neither too hot nor too cold. The deaths are classified as follows:—

	Males.	Females.	Tal.
Heart diseases	2	8	10
Brain ,, ...	14	8	22
Chest ,, ...	9	9	18
Phthisis	7	4	11
Cancer	3	6	9
Kidney diseases	4	2	6
Abdominal ,, ...	5	7	12
Age	20	17	37
Premature birth	4	3	7
Injuries	3	2	5
Zymotic diseases	3	2	5
All other causes	10	5	15
	84	73	157

The deaths from zymotic diseases were due to diarrhœa 2; diphtheria 2; whooping cough 1: a total of five. This compares favourably with the preceding year's total of thirteen deaths, and reduces the ratio of zymotic deaths per 1,000 deaths to 31·84, as against 66·66 in 1893, and per 1,000 population to ·52, as against 1·35. I wish to make a special note of the infantile deaths. These are fewer than in the previous year, and much below the average of other places in the county, as I gather from the "Analysis of reports of Medical Officers of Health," issued by the County Council: the number is seven less than in 1893—24 to 31—and seven of the 24 were certified as having been prematurely born. The ratio of infant deaths per 1,000 deaths is 159·235, and per 1,000 births 102·56: in 1893 the ratios were 158·97 and 136·56 respectively.

I may note that three deaths were certified as due to alcoholic excess, and three as directly due to influenza: this however does not fully represent the number of deaths that may be indirectly attributed to either of these causes.

The registered births were 234, as against 227 in 1893, and 236 in 1892, and give a birth-rate of 24·34; that in 1893 being 23·61,—in 1892, 24·54,—and in 1891, 26·83: there is some recovery from the marked decline of the last few years. The male and female births were equal, there being 117 of each. Eleven of the infants were illegitimate, 5 being born in the Workhouse. This compares favourably with the record of 1893, when 16 illegitimates were registered, 8 being born in the Workhouse.

In comparison with previous years, the town has suffered little from infectious disease, the cases notified being but 60, as against 102 in 1893. Scarlatina has been much less prevalent; enteric fever practically absent; and whooping cough and measles, which are not notifiable under the acts as adopted here, have not, as far as my observation goes, been troublesome. The only black spot in the record of the year is the

outbreak of diphtheria, a disease which has hitherto been rare in Frome. It has not now been epidemic, spreading from person to person, or from house to house, but two deaths have been caused by it. Precautions have, in every case, been taken to prevent an extension of the disease, which is becoming increasingly prevalent throughout the country, many districts having during the year suffered severely. We have, in Frome, no reason to be alarmed, but it behoves every householder to see that his drainage is perfect, and that the best possible water is supplied. I will now deal with the diseases seriatim. One case alone of enteric fever was notified, and this recovered; the attack was not a severe one, and no other sickness was observed in the house. The water used was of poor quality, being drawn from the spring which runs beneath St. John's churchyard. The course of this spring makes the water particularly liable to sewage contamination, and cases of enteric have in previous years cropped up in premises supplied from the same source. I had samples of water taken from each house dependent on the same supply; they varied considerably, but all were very inferior to the town water, which I recommended to be laid on. Scarlatina has greatly diminished, only eighteen cases having been reported, compared with eighty-five in 1893, and eighty-six in 1892; from the end of June we were practically free, fourteen cases having occurred in the first half of the year, and only four in the last six months. If parents were as prompt in noticing the onset of this disease, and sending for the doctor, as the medical profession in the town is in notifying and isolating the cases, we should in all probability hear little more of scarlatina. In one case, that came under my notice, a child continued his attendance at school until sent home in the desquamating stage. Diarrhœa has not been frequent during the year, the mild summer accounting for this. Two deaths only, both of children, were certified, whereas in 1893 there were no less than nine. Twenty cases of erysipelas were reported, without causing any death. Whooping cough and measles have not been prevalent; a few cases have come to my notice, but I have not heard of any wide-spread epidemic. One death from whooping cough, took place in the Workhouse in the early part of the year, a child below five years of age.

It is rarely that a Medical Officer of Health, in Frome, has to make diphtheria a matter of special comment; the few cases that turn up being confined to one house, and that almost invariably one where cows are kept. One case occurred in the early part of last year, but in November and December twenty cases were notified from eleven separate houses. The disease, as I stated before, has not been epidemic; the cases, as far as I can ascertain, have had no connection with each other, except that in most families infected all of the children have suffered. One day a case would be reported from Cottle's Oak, the next day one from Keyford, and then from the Market-place; the water supply in the various houses was not the same, and the children attended different schools. The disease has been of a mild type, only two deaths out of twenty-one cases is a very low death-rate; both deaths were of young children. Laryngeal complications were generally absent, thus accounting for the low mortality.

The Infectious Diseases Hospital has, naturally, been less used than in the previous year, only four patients having been admitted, but in two at least of these cases signal benefit has been derived, and what might otherwise have become a serious epidemic has been checked in its commencement. I am glad to note that a separate mortuary has been built, and the shed that was set apart for that purpose is now available for storing superfluous bedding, and for purposes of general disinfection by moist heat and antiseptics. The manner in which the work has been carried out commands my approval, and when the promised additional ward is completed we shall be adequately equipped for dealing with initial cases of infectious disease. I hope early in the year to meet a committee of the District Council to make suggestions as to a dietary scale. Before leaving this subject, I wish to express my appreciation of the admirable way in which the Hospital is managed and nursed by the present caretakers.

Turning now, gentlemen, from the statistics of disease and death to general Sanitary work, I am glad to place on record my opinion that never in my recollection has it been more efficiently carried out than in 1894. All matters connected with infectious disease have been most promptly attended to by the Inspectors, and the necessary steps taken without delay. The methods adopted of deodorizing and flushing the sewers have been much more efficacious in preventing bad odours; I have occasional complaints of nuisance from street gratings, but the stench from the Sewage Works has only during one month—on several occasions in July—been a cause of complaint.

The scavenging of the town is well carried out, the method adopted proving generally satisfactory.

Notices have been sent me by the Inspector on six occasions to visit premises alleged to be in an insanitary state, and each case has been dealt with as seemed best; I found it necessary, in two cases, to recommend the closure of the houses. It must be a matter of congratulation to all of us to notice how new and more commodious dwellings for artizans are being built in almost every outskirt of the town; and, in comparing the housing of our inhabitants now with what obtained only a few years since, to feel that we share in the ever-increasing prosperity of the country as a whole.

Twenty-two samples of drinking water, drawn from various wells in the town, have been submitted to me. Only two of these were up to the standard I require as a potable water, and they were vastly inferior to the town supply. I very much regret that objections are raised to supplying every house from the town mains; any well or spring within the borough must necessarily vary in quality from time to time, and may at any moment become a source of disease. Having one of the purest and most wholesome waters in the kingdom within reach of our doors, it seems an unwise policy to condemn householders, and those frequently of the poorest class, to drink a far inferior water, which may at any time become productive of illness. In any town of antiquity an extra-mural supply alone is reliable.

The routine inspection of bakehouses has been made by me; the Sanitary Inspector visits the dairies and milkshops in the district.

Allow me to express my pleasure, gentlemen, in presenting to the first Urban District Council of Frome so satisfactory a report, and to hope that, under the newly-constituted authority, we may still progress towards sanitary perfection.

Believe to be,

Your obedient servant,

FREDERICK PARSONS.

Frome, Jan. 25th, 1895.